

Summary

VSDB Consolidation Task Force Meeting

June 3-4, 2003

J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College
Goochland Campus

Task Force Members Present: Martha Adams for Julie Stanley, Nancy Armstrong, Mary-Margaret Cash, Scott Goodman (chair), Emmett Hanger, Jr., Ronald Lanier, Jo Lynne DeMary (substitute for June 4: Doug Cox), Glen Slonneger, Lisa Surber, Malinda Washington for Darlene White, and David Young. **DOE staff:** Doug Cox, Karen Trump. **Facilitator:** Judy Burtner.

Objectives

1. Review the language of appropriate act item 138 #6c and develop a purpose statement to guide the Task Force's work
2. Develop operating procedures
3. Orient members to available information about the two schools
4. Identify issues regarding consolidation of the two schools
5. Review and develop plans for stakeholder input
6. Develop a meeting schedule (dates, locations) with tentative objectives for each session

Participation Guidelines

The participants agreed to the use of the following participation guidelines:

- Take care of your own needs
- Breaks will be taken at natural breaks in the process
- Participate but share airtime
- Cellphones on stun/mute
- Sessions will start and end on schedule
- Use of parking lot for items not pertinent to the discussion of the moment but important
- Work to stay present, focused, and conscious

Statement of Purpose

The language from the Appropriate Act Item 138 #6c was reviewed. Particular attention was paid to the following sections:

Board of Education should convene a Task Force to develop a plan for consolidating services for the deaf and/or blind and multi-disabled students served by Virginia's two schools for these students.

The plan shall include an examination of appropriate academic programs, staffing requirements, facility requirements, student transportation services, and individual arrangement necessary for all students currently receiving services to continue receiving services.

All options for serving students shall be considered.

Plan also shall include the steps necessary to achieve consolidation, funding requirements and/or savings, alternative uses of facilities, and a suggested timeline for achieving consolidation.

The Task Force agreed to the following **statement of purpose**:

To develop a plan of implementation for consolidating services for the deaf and/or blind and multi-disabled students served by Virginia's two schools for these students.

Operating Procedures

Members agreed to the use of the following operating procedures:

- Seven members have to be present for a quorum to conduct business and make decisions
- Modified consensus will be used as the tool for making decisions. In the event that consensus cannot be reached within a reasonable time frame, gradients of agreement will be used as the decision-making tool. Should members not be able to reach a decision using the gradients of agreement tool, the Task Force will vote with a decision made with 75% of those present voting in the affirmative or negative.
- Members having to miss a meeting can send a substitute who can participate in the discussion and decision-making on their behalf. Members are to share with their substitute all pertinent information before he/she attends a meeting. Information can also be e-mailed to the Task Force via K. Trump should a member be unable to attend or send a substitute.
- Any decisions that are made will stand regardless of whether all Task Force members were present.
- Requests from persons not on the Task Force for information or a hearing before the Task Force are to submit their requests to the Chair, S. Goodman, directly or via K. Trump. K. Trump will relay all requests she receives to the Chair for his consideration.
- A fifteen-minute comment period will be held at the beginning of each meeting as long as long as the Task Force is still in a stage of deliberation. Each person who speaks will have 3 minutes to speak on the topic of options for consolidation. There will be no dialogue with members of the Task Force.
- Members will review the information to be shared from sessions by e-mail prior to its release to the public.

- The two school Superintendents will keep their staff informed as the process evolves. The two parent representatives working with their school superintendent will keep parents at their schools informed. D. Cox will see that information is placed on the DOE Website.
- Roles –
 - Chair – Representative from the Board of Education, all information (requests for information from those outside the Task Force should flow to him), he will relay the final report to the Board of Education as an informational item
 - Facilitator – Responsible for keeping the Task Force focused on the task at hand, seeing that all members have an equal opportunity to be heard, and managing the decision-making process.
 - DOE staff (Cox and Trump) – provides support to the Task Force, both logistical and programmatic.

Gradients of Agreement Model for Decision-Making

1	2	3	4	5
Agree	Agree but have reservations	Neutral	Dislike but won't fight publicly	Veto

Explanation: If all members' votes fall within 1-4, the decision is made. However, if votes fall with 2-4, it is a "weak" decision with "lukewarm support" and the members might want to reconsider it.

The Issues – Background and Data on the Issues

K. Trump presented the following information to the members:

- PowerPoint presentation on the two programs (Hampton and Staunton), a historical perspective, the national picture, the state outreach services, diploma options, enrollment data, comparison data relative to the two schools enrollment and children being served by local divisions, the advisory commission, student placement relative to superintendent's regions, placing school divisions, factors for placement, employees data at two schools, funding, facility issues – dedicated boilers and the lead-based paint abatement at Staunton, the foundation, licensure status, facility layout and use at Staunton, facilities at Hampton
- Synopsis of studies of the Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind regarding consolidation
- The two Board of Education actions taken as the result of the above studies
- Financial data/biennium budgets for two schools
- Enrollment changes for the schools at Hampton and Staunton
- Serious Incident Summary Reports – Hampton and Staunton

K. Trump provided handouts on all the above items so a summary of her remarks is not included here.

Need for Additional Information

Members brainstormed a list of additional information needs:

- Accessibility to buildings by all disability groups
- Why schools are not a part of DOE's accountability efforts
- How "No Child left Behind" policies relate to children with disabilities
- Divisions with children placed at either or both of the schools and also children remaining in home division – why are children being sent to both locations or some children sent and some served by local division
- Who else is using the building space at the two facilities – public (state and local), nonprofit – private, etc.? What percentage of the space is being used by others?
- Why don't parents know about the schools?
- What credentials are required of teachers, teacher aids, dorm supervisors, and interpreters?
- What capabilities exist at each school? Who can they serve now – what type of student?
- Why are they two separate agencies?
- What is the legislative requirement that fences their funds?
- What is the universe (potential) of students out there?
- Comparison of outcomes – graduates of the two schools versus graduates of other schools, i.e., test scores, employability
- How placement is driven by an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- What additional programs are needed to support these children?
- Transportation – existing – what's in place now, what's necessary, cost per child, timing (pick-up, etc.), core hours child receives
- Military families – how many are served now? How many are consistently served? How many refuse to come to Virginia because of lack of services for their children?
- How many children are presently being served that the parents would prefer to keep them in the community if the appropriate services were available?
- Parent issues – need for additional services pass the academic services, i.e., afternoon, summer programs, etc.
- The value of residential services – peer, socialization, immersion programs
- What models are local divisions using to serve the same students, particularly models where the children are not mainstreamed?
- Is there a model in another state that is viewed as being more efficient?
- Admissions process – least restrictive environments, placement, IEP process

Members reviewed the above brainstormed list of informational needs and choose those they felt were most important to the discussion in that having the information would add value to the discussion/deliberations and the information could be obtained within 60 days. They also identified who would be responsible for obtaining the information. The list is as follows (in no particular order):

- Accessibility to buildings by all disability groups – K. Trump
- Divisions with children placed at either or both of the schools and also children remaining in home division – why are children being sent to both locations or some children sent and some served by local division – K. Trump (will work within the confidentiality issue), focus groups
- How “No Child left Behind” policies relate to children with disabilities – D. Cox
- Who else is using the building space at the two facilities – public (state and local), nonprofit – private, etc.? What percentage of the space is being used by others? – K. Trump
- What capabilities exist at each school? Who can they serve now – what type of student? – M. Washington, N. Armstrong
- Comparison of outcomes – graduates of the two schools versus graduates of other schools, i.e., test scores, employability – G. Slonneger (visual impairment data)
- What additional programs are needed to support these children? (To be collected later)
- How many children are presently being served that the parents would prefer to keep them in the community if the appropriate services were available? – focus groups
- What models are local divisions using to serve the same students, particularly models where the children are not mainstreamed? – K. Trump
- Transportation – existing – what’s in place now, what’s necessary, cost per child, timing (pick-up, etc.), core hours child receives – M. Washington, N. Armstrong
- Military families – how many are served now? How many are consistently served? How many refuse to come to Virginia because of lack of services for their children? – D. Young
- Is there a model in another state that is viewed as being more efficient? – K. Trump
- Admissions process – least restrictive environments, placement, IEP process – K. Trump
- After school activities at both schools – what activities are being provided at both schools in addition to academic classes? – M. Washington, N. Armstrong

Stakeholder Input

It was suggested by DOE staff and members that surveys, public hearings and focus groups could serve as the forums to gain stakeholder input. Each member was asked to identify the three main stakeholder groups they would like to hear their views and rank them in priority order. Items were collected in rounds and weights were given to level of priority: 3 points for first priority, 2 points for second priority, and 1 point for third priority. The results were as follows:

- Parents of sensory-impaired children – TAHIC – 18 points
- Alumni from the two schools – 12 points
- Existing staff (teachers) at the two schools – 8 points
- Consumer groups – Blind/deaf – 7 points
- People involved in regional programs – 5 points

- School administrators – Superintendents, Special Education Directions from local divisions – 4 points
- National Military Family Association – 3 points
- Retired teachers of deaf and/or blind, either from the schools or elsewhere – 3 points
- Partnership for people with disabilities – 3 points
- DOE staff – 2 points
- Special Education Advisory Commission/DOE – 1 point
- Alumni – Partners in policy making – 1 point

After the process was completed, one member asked that students be added to the above listing.

Members defined consumer groups for the blind and/or deaf and in the process combined some of the above items:

- Virginia Association for the Deaf
- National Federation of the Blind
- American Council of the Blind
- Virginia Association of Independent Living Centers
- Virginia Association of Deaf/Blind
- Partnership for People with Disabilities

Members agreed that public input/stakeholder input would be captured by the following means:

- Nine focus groups – see below
- Comment period at meetings as long as the deliberation process continues
- Public hearings
- DOE mailbox

Public Comment Period

A public comment period will be a part of Task Force meetings as long as deliberations are underway. Guidelines were developed:

- The 15-minute public comment period will occur at the beginning of the meeting
- Each speaker will be given no more than 3 minutes to make their comments
- There will be no dialogue between speakers and Task Force members
- Speakers will be asked to limit their comments to the consolidation of services and the various options to bring about consolidation
- Sign-up to speak will occur prior to the beginning of the meeting
- If a person has spoken at a previous meeting, her or her name will go to the bottom of the list to speak

Public hearings

Two public hearings will be held in the Williamsburg and Roanoke areas the first two weeks of September. Speakers will be asked to speak to the issue of consolidation and the effect on the children being served by the two schools.

Focus Groups

Members decided nine focus groups would be held to solicit information from some of the stakeholder groups listed above. The following locations were identified for the various stakeholder groups:

- Parents of sensory-impaired children – Abingdon, Staunton and Hampton. The parents may also be alumni, teachers (retired), TAHIC, locally based service recipients, military families, Partners in policy making (those that are alumni), parents on advisory committees, parents from consumer groups
- Alumni groups – Northern Virginia and Richmond. Participants should include alumni from the two schools, alumni from school divisions that have locally served sensory-impaired children, teachers and parents who attended one or both of the two schools
- Teachers and service providers – Hampton and Staunton
- Consumer groups – Blind/Deaf – Northern Virginia
- Administrators/Special Education staff/local and regional – mix between the divisions that have children at one of the two and those that serve the children locally – Richmond

Focus Group Content

It was agreed that input would be sought from participants on the various options under study, their advantages/disadvantages, the effect on the child and his/her family should the option become reality, and the solicitation of additional options for consideration.

In addition, the parent groups would be asked questions regarding the possibility of taking children back to the local school divisions. School administrators would be asked questions regarding the impact of children moving back to local divisions for services.

Tentative options were brainstormed:

- Leave both schools open but with changes – downsized, opening up space for other entities, upgrade for certain groups of students, etc.
- Consolidate to one of the current facilities
- Close both and relocate to another location
- Close both schools, download functions to regional, local divisions
- Close the high school and consolidate the elementary school
- Eliminate element of blind, visually impaired and serve only deaf and hard-of-hearing
- Schools serve as technical education centers to local divisions

Future Meetings

Members brainstormed the following tasks for the duration of the Task Force:

- Keep constituents informed
- Review of existing programs – their strengths and weaknesses
- Review all relevant data
- Describe services needed for children;
- Receive and evaluate input from focus groups/public comment
- Define/describe options
- Narrow the options
- Determine additional data needs for the top 2-3 options
- Develop a matrix to identify impacts of options
- Identify all costs associated with plan and its implementation
- Do what's best for children and not be influenced by other outside factors
- Consider schools' support of students and their individual needs
- Investigate regional capabilities
- Review transportation requirements per federal and state requirements
- Draft and review plan
- Forward the final report
- Conduct public hearings
- Stay objective
- Provide materials in formats appropriate for participants as well as augmented listening devices
- Evaluate response of those disadvantages by the plan
- Identify and outline facility needs relative to federal/state law
- Current staff (if schools close) – Note: it was decided this would be a part of the implementation planning
- Make good use of meeting time by doing homework prior to meeting

Future Meeting Schedule

- June 23, 10:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m. – Fredericksburg area
 - Tentative agenda
 - Public comment period
 - Review data
 - Look at a typical day of a student
 - Review what services are currently available
 - Review regional capabilities
 - Invite someone from Fairfax/Virginia Beach divisions who serve children in group settings to share how they serve these children
 - Start the process “making sense” of data – “what does it tell us”
- July 31, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. – Charlottesville area

- Tentative agenda
 - Public comment period
 - Review focus group results and other public comments
 - Discussion implications of what is being heard
 - Clarify the options – Develop a list of preliminary options
 - Select options to be explored further
- August 27, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. – Staunton
 - Tentative agenda
 - Public comment period
 - One hour – spent touring the school and gaining an understanding of its program
 - Working with the data/options
 - Selection of option(s)
 - Developing first draft
- October 7, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. – Hampton
 - Tentative agenda
 - Public comment period
 - One hour – spent touring the school and gaining an understanding of its program
 - Review of public hearings results
 - Adjustments made to draft
 - Adoption of plan

Other Key Dates

- Public hearings will be held on the draft plan the first two weeks of September in the Williamsburg and Roanoke areas (Task Force members to be in attendance)
- October 20 – plan completed by Task Force
- November 1 – plan delivered to General Assembly committees and as an informational item to the Board of Education

Parking Lot

Several items were placed on a “parking lot” as issues that will be discussed at a later date:

- What is the definition of “consolidation?”
- That the participation rate in meetings be noted in the final plan
- Financial data – expenditures at both schools – FY02
- The issue of appropriations versus allotments relative to funding

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6-12-03